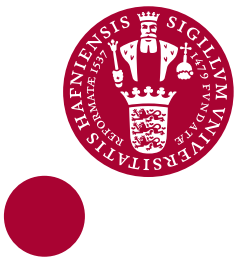

Beyond Education

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Beyond Education: What Role can Schools Play in the Support and Protection of Children in Extreme Settings?

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Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the development of the field of 'schools in extreme settings' as a specific problem space for research that informs school-focused policies and interventions to support children in adversity. Through a review of articles in this issue of *International Journal of Education Development*, we argue that such a field can facilitate a much needed discussion on the role of schools in supporting and protecting vulnerable children, highlighting how schools both contribute to and actively address disadvantages and hardship facing children. We end the paper by charting out key research areas for the field. We caution against earmarking schools and teachers as actors responsible for ameliorating the impacts of complex social problems in the absence of efforts to embed schools in supportive local community, national and global responses to support such a trend.

Key words: Schools; Education; Child Protection; Child Development; Health

1. Introduction

Schools are increasingly charged with the responsibility of addressing complex social problems faced by children and adolescents. This can be with the intention of furthering learning, for example through inclusive and accessible education, or of socializing children to become 'responsible citizens'. It can also be with the aim of promoting their psychosocial and physical health, or of addressing particular child protection issues. Regardless of the agenda, initiatives to expand the role of schools above and beyond education are likely to also expand the mandate and responsibilities of school actors (e.g., school management and teachers) involved with children's education. Although this can pose an opportunity or challenge to schools in any context, it is a phenomenon, we argue, that can be effectively discussed through an interrogation of how schools in extreme settings respond to the challenges faced by students.

We take extreme settings to include any setting in which acute or chronic forms of social disruption, such as disaster, illness, poverty, injustice, exclusion or conflict, impact on the well-being of children, and undermine the ability of significant adults in a child's family or community to safeguard their physical, emotional or social well-being. In such situations there are growing calls for schools to 'substitute for families' in supporting children (Ansell, 2008; Wood & Hillman, 2009; Nordveit, 2010). Nordveit (2010:223), for example, drawing on research with HIV- and poverty affected children and schools in Namibia and Swaziland, notes that "the school emerges as the institution that can take over some of the protective and socializing roles that parents and the community have traditionally provided". It is such accounts, arguably in concert with economic austerity, which has led to reductions in welfare funding and development aid, that have given rise to the growing number of policy documents that promote and support this expanded role of school (Hoadley, 2007).

The education system is usually the largest single institutional network and body of skilled people who interact with children in any country. In many ways this makes schools uniquely placed as a potential source of care and support for vulnerable children. But is it realistic to expect schools to play such roles, going way above and

beyond their education mandate, in the support and protection of children in extreme settings where schools are often already heavily burdened and under-resourced?

Flyvbjerg (2006: p.229) notes that "extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied." It is against this background, and in our interest to critically appraise the support roles and responsibilities of school actors that this special issue seeks to contribute to the development of the field of 'schools in extreme settings' as a specific problem space for research that informs school-focused policies and interventions to support children in adversity, both more generally and in settings characterized by some form of acute or chronic form of social disruption.

In this Introduction we outline how such a field could pull together research that informs three challenges. The first is that of identifying and strengthening already existing and latent support resources and structures in schools. The second is that of identifying and challenging ways in which schools themselves might contribute to the social disadvantages and injustices facing children. A third and related challenge is that of mapping out and understanding how contextual factors facilitate or hinder the ability of schools to support and protect children in extreme settings.

1.1 Schools as nodes of support

It can be difficult to disentangle when support offered by schools goes beyond formal academic education. Much formal support of marginalized learners, such as inclusive education practices, which require schools and teachers to develop new ways of working, is ultimately about achieving 'education for all' (UNESCO, 1994: ix; Ainscow et al., 2013). Similarly, many care and support practices within school settings are driven by recognition that failure to consider the social and personal problems of children and young people impedes the efforts of teachers and interferes with learning by pupils (Marland, 1974; Calvert, 2009; Sharpe, 2014). Such practices may include school-based projects that focus on specific problems, such as bullying or substance abuse, or by connecting children and young people with agencies that are equipped to meet the

needs of those with social, mental or physical health problems (Calvert, 2009; Tucker, 2013; Adelman & Taylor, 2014). Care and support can also be offered in informal ways. In fact, a cornerstone of pedagogy is the quality of the relationship between adults and children. However it is not always clear when or how a caring relationship between a teacher and pupil constitutes a form of support, and whether the relationship is 'performed' to further the learning of pupils or driven by a strong ethic of care, *in loco parentis* (Vogt, 2002). There are however growing numbers of case studies of how teachers informally take on caring roles that extend beyond their traditional educational role. In the context of HIV and poverty for example, schoolteachers have been observed to provide counseling to distressed leaners, and offer them food and protection, often using their own limited resources (Bhana et al., 2006; Kendall & O'Gara, 2007; Ogina, 2010; Nordveit, 2010).

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recognizes the potential for schools to transform and nurture more inclusive education and support practices. Through the 'child-friendly schools' model, UNICEF seeks to promote safe educational environments, where adequately resourced schools and trained teachers are able to nurture emotional and social conditions for learning (UNICEF, 2009). The potential to co-locate services within schools has been recognized by the World Health Organisation (WHO), through the 'health promoting schools' model. This model promotes the capacity of schools to offer a health-enabling environment that nurtures an ethic of care, influences health-related behaviours and empowers pupils and staff to take control over their health (WHO, 1997, 2000; Tang et al., 2009).

The international drive to encourage schools and teachers to develop more inclusive practices, develop 'caring', 'child friendly' or 'health promoting' school cultures, and actively engage with school-based welfare services, underlines much thinking around the notion of schools as nodes of support. While there is little doubt that vulnerable children and young people can benefit substantially from schools adopting certain support and protection practices, implementing these practices does, in many cases, require the schools to adopt new ways of working.

In many contexts, extending the role of schools and teachers to helping children deal with hardship involves significant changes to schooling norms. Such changes may not always be realistic or welcome in the most disrupted or deprived settings. This is particularly the case in low and middle-income contexts, but also in marginalized communities in high-income countries, where children's problems may also be severe, and school resources already heavily stretched (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Urwick & Elliott, 2010). Hoadley (2007) critically appraises the growing number of South African education policies that promote schools as nodes of support. She highlights that many teachers struggle to fulfill their role as educators due to factors that interfere with children's learning, and find it unfair that they are additionally tasked with identifying, supporting and monitoring vulnerable children – roles traditionally held by social workers or child support agencies. Hoadley (2007) goes on to argue that policies promoting schools as nodes of support need to be adequately resourced, so that schools are actually able to meet this new expectation and support vulnerable children. A similar argument has been made by Kendall and O'Gara (2007), who looked at schools responding to child hardship in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Malawi. They found teachers to be overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with the emotional and psychosocial needs of children, arguing that extending the role of schools to also meet the care, protection and socialization needs of vulnerable children must go hand in hand with strategic investments (ibid.). However, in contexts where investments are available, commentators warn against burdening schools with these additional roles, arguing it has the potential to deflect their attention from their vital role in generating a skilled and educated workforce (Adelman and Taylor, 2014). In fact, writing from a North American perspective, Adelman and Taylor (2014) outrightly warn against *projectitis*, referring to the unrelenting pursuit of school-based projects that are short-lived, problem-specific and focus on particular groups of vulnerable children and young people. Instead, they call for long-term and systemic changes that can more effectively address the problems that interfere with student learning. But achieving systemic change in a school system is challenging. Reflecting on their challenges of introducing the health promoting school concept to schools in Sydney, Australia, Keshavarz et al (2010) argue that schools are

complex adaptive systems that are highly context dependent, framing how actors and networks within a school system exhibit different levels of adaptiveness, control and predictability in their engagement with a programme.

Schools do have a role to play in supporting and protecting students facing hardship (UNICEF, 2009; Tang et al., 2009; Pufall et al., 2014). But as this discussion suggests, how this role is defined, resourced and enacted in different contexts remains unresolved.

1.2 Special issue overview

As discussed above, expanding the role of schools and teachers to take on broader responsibilities for children's health and social services, is a real and unresolved challenge (Keshavarz et al., 2010; Adelman & Taylor, 2014). To date, current research on school support for vulnerable children in extreme settings has tended to take the form of isolated papers (e.g., Bhana et al., 2006; Nordveit, 2010; Skovdal et al., 2014), or piecemeal small-scale studies of one-off programmes in particular schools (e.g., Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011; Khanare, 2012). There is an urgent need for a systematic research base focusing on schools in extreme settings that collectively captures learning that can help us unpack the role of schools in supporting and protecting vulnerable learners. It is against this background, and in line with our interest to demarcate the field of 'schools in extreme settings' as a specific problem space, that we convened a two-day workshop at the London School of Economics and Political Science in September 2013. The workshop saw the coming together of 20 academic experts who were carefully chosen[1] to interrogate the assumption that schools can fulfill a support and protection role. In this special issue we have gathered 15 papers presented at this workshop with the aim of providing a holistic overview of the different

[1] A call for papers was made publicly available on the *International Journal of Educational Development* website and circulated amongst our networks. We received 35 long abstracts.
Authors of 18 abstracts were invited to submit a full paper and attend a workshop in London.

ways in which schools in diverse and extreme settings are seeking to advance an ‘ethic of care’, and of factors that facilitate or hinder them in this challenge.

The first key feature of this volume is its multi-disciplinarity. It includes expertise from social psychology, history, anthropology, psychiatry, geography, sociology, education and development studies. A second feature is the methodological range of the body of papers. These range from large-scale comparative studies of several schools in a single country or schools across a range of countries, to multi-method ethnographic explorations of small-scale situations. Between them, the papers provide deeply textured insights about the potential for schools in very different contexts to support vulnerable children through the development of supportive relationships within the school setting, whilst also paying close attention to the embeddedness of schools in wider community and social contexts that are often vital in determining the success of within-school efforts.

The third feature of the volume is its mapping out of a wide range of potential pathways between schooling and child well-being, and how these might best be supported. Several papers focus on externally imposed interventions such as the roll-out of wider government policy, for example free school meals in India, or the history curriculum in Lebanon. Others report on programmes initiated in particular schools – including interventions to promote good intercultural relations and to enhance psychosocial well-being in UK schools. Other papers report on programmes initiated by international development agencies, such as cash transfers to increase school inclusion in Peru, Palestine and Kenya, and sex education in Uganda, and in South Africa, Swaziland and Tanzania.

In contrast, other papers look at schools in naturalistic settings, outside of the context of planned interventions. These include spontaneous school responses to an earthquake in New Zealand, community perceptions of school in Palestine, the interface between pupils, teachers and community in Zimbabwe, informal engagements between teachers and sexually abused girls in South Africa or children on antiretroviral treatment (ART) in Namibia, and relationships between refugees and fellow pupils in England. A focus on

organic school responses, developed out of the context of externally imposed interventions, is particularly important given the decline in education budgets and international development aid in many settings. In many contexts, schools may be best served by policies that identify and bolster already existing indigenous support strategies rather than relying on extensive external resources and input.

In the remainder of this Guest Editor's Introduction we have three goals.
We begin by mapping out the content of the papers, grouping them around their contributions to understandings of the potential for schools to advance children's socialization, social inclusion, health, welfare and access to services. We do so in a way that draws attention to internal and contextual factors that facilitate and hinder the ability of schools to do this, with particular attention to the interface between schools, parents and the wider community, as well as social and policy contexts. We conclude by highlighting some of the complex and unresolved debates about the potential for schools to go 'beyond education'. Taken together, the papers in this collection highlight how this potential vary strongly from one context to another. They suggest that attention to the impacts of wider contextual factors is key to designing policies and interventions to optimize the potential of schools to support vulnerable children. Whilst there is much that schools and teachers can do in many settings, they cannot be earmarked to ameliorate the impacts of complex social problems that are beyond their reach – in the absence of strenuous efforts to ensure their embeddedness in local community, national, and, where relevant, global efforts to support their work.

2. The papers

2.1 The role of schools in the positive socialisation of children

Four papers focus specifically on the potential for schools to socialize children in ways that advance their physical, psychological and social health. The first of these is a social psychological and comparative study of schools in three regions of England

characterized by very different levels of wider physical segregation and inter-group tension and discrimination. Although this may not be an obvious 'extreme' context, the implications of failed multiculturalism are high on the agenda both in the United Kingdom and Western Europe more broadly, speaking to increasingly apparent and explosive faultlines of social injustice and exclusion. Exploring the potential of schools in promoting positive intercultural relations, **Howarth and Andreouli** (this issue) highlight the impact of wider local and regional environments on the likelihood that schools act as agents of positive socialization. They conclude that schools and teachers cannot 'do it alone' in tackling the deeply rooted complexities of prejudice and discrimination in the absence of interconnected initiatives by local and national government. School level initiatives to tackle discrimination and advance children's intercultural tolerance, must therefore be considered in relation to the macro, meso and micro contexts that characterize diverse school settings (ibid.).

Both Akesson (this issue) and van Ommering (this issue) generate a critical understanding of the education-conflict nexus, questioning the potential of schools in settings of conflict to adequately prepare children for lives in situations of dire political conflict. Drawing on research with 18 Palestinian families, **Akesson** (this issue) explores local representations and meanings of schools as a protective space. In doing so, Akesson uncovers the tensions of the school as a place of both violence and hope. On one hand schools were seen as targets of the political conflict, with schools being threatened with demolition and Israeli military personnel reportedly entering school compounds and harassing children and teachers. The families also spoke of the many risks associated with the journey of walking to school, with Israeli checkpoints representing significant physical and psychological barriers to children's access to education. On the other hand, and despite children's fears of accessing and attending school, education was seen as hope for the future. Schools offered a routine in the midst of conflict and served as an instrument to resist the occupation. In other words, attending school became an act and symbol of resistance to the occupation, a way for children to be socialized into a community that refuses to be put down. Instead, the

school-conflict interface came to represent an opportunity to socialize determination and perseverance in pupils, both to be successful in school and to maintain a strong community.

The ethnographic study by **van Ommering** (this issue) draws on a wide range of perspectives including students and teachers, curriculum designers and academics, and media and politicians, in exploring the potential for the school history curriculum in Lebanon to contribute both to peace building and to aggravating social conflict. His study finds that history education in Lebanon, despite a potential to focus on a shared social and economic past, focuses on a divisive political history. This, coupled with a didactic teaching style that favours memorizing historical 'facts' at the expense of dialogical and critical analyses, makes history education a critical conjuncture, serving as an instrument of war rather than peace. Despite interest from children and young people to know the 'real' history of Lebanon, teachers, out of fear, scarred by own experiences, and from pressure from political parties to conform to a national history narrative, struggle to socialize children for a more peaceful future. Van Ommering's observations suggest that schools are heavily polluted by wider political power struggles that made teaching difficult and left students frustrated by lack of debate about the issues framing daily life. He concludes that the history classroom, through an interplay between factors at both a micro (e.g., teaching styles) and macro (e.g., text books and curricula) level, remains essential in reproducing conflict.

In contrast to the constraining school context identified by van Ommering, **McLaughlin et al.** (this issue) underscore how enabling pupils to become significant social actors in their own education has the potential to bring about positive social transformation. They illustrate this potential through a large multi-method action research study involving pupils, community members and teachers in the development of a HIV education curriculum that was relevant and appropriate to the contexts of schools in Ghana, Swaziland and Kenya. HIV has had a devastating impact, crippling the infrastructure (e.g., schools, health care services, economy) of many resource-constrained countries

in sub-Saharan Africa, representing an extreme context. The intervention was developed against the background that education about sex, relationships and HIV is riddled with socio-cultural complexity; thus engaging pupils, teachers and community members is vital to develop HIV competent communities (cf. Campbell et al., 2013). McLaughlin et al. found that even in different schools in different settings, the use of child-centered methods that emphasized student voice in dialogue with adults (unusual in these contexts) were unequivocally found to increase pupil's sense of agency and their health-related beliefs and practices. Change however did not happen overnight and willingness to accept and facilitate child-led processes differed between the contexts. Variability shifted between adult insistence on leading the process or willingness to give children this space. In Ghana, in particular, the participation of head teachers and prominent community stakeholders was more likely to lead to a hierarchical context and tended to silence pupils' inputs. Swaziland and Kenya seemed more accepting of inclusion of pupil voices. Nonetheless, McLaughlin et al. found that over time trust grew between adults and children. Teachers, community members and pupils, through frequent dialogue, got to know each other better and conversations grew increasingly open and more frank. Arguing for the need to include pupils and community members in debates about how HIV and sexuality education should be taught, McLaughlin et al. speak to the HIV education-community nexus. It is a nexus that underlines the importance of pupil's participation in school and curricula development, community dialogue and temporality in socializing children and young people to make more health-enabling decisions in contexts characterized by a silencing of children and HIV.

All four of these papers explore the role of broader social forces in facilitating or hindering the capacity of schools to support healthy child development and socialization around community values. Schools were able to build environments for positive child development in the presence of broader social institutions (such as community groups and government bodies) ready to grapple with uncomfortable topics such as cultural difference and racism in the UK (Howarth and Andreouli, this issue), community

solidarity in the face of violence and oppression in the Palestinian territories (Akesson, this issue), the divisive political history of Lebanon's war (van Ommering, this issue) and sex and HIV in Ghana, Swaziland and Kenya (McLaughlin et al., this issue), finding ways to engage school and children in these conversations. Schools were constrained when adults were unable or unwilling to address difficult social issues in broader social contexts, and when adults sought to shield children from engaging with these issues — despite children being aware of and seeking dialogue on these topics.

2.2 Facilitating school inclusion

As discussed above, facilitation of school inclusion is a frequently voiced policy ideal. In high-income countries this often refers to the inclusion of children with disabilities and developmental disorders. In low and middle-income countries, this extends to children living in families affected by poverty, disease and other forms of social disruption. Two papers included in this Issue look at factors that shape the ability of schools in low resource contexts to be more inclusive, interrogating the interaction between demand (understood in terms of community, household and family willingness and ability to send children to school) and supply (the extent to which school is able to deliver its potential benefits for education, health and welfare).

Jones and Samuels (this issue) explore the potential for donor funded cash transfer programmes in Kenya, Peru and Palestine, in conditions of extreme poverty, to increase levels of social protection through school inclusion. Cash transfer programmes involve a regular (monthly or bimonthly) transfer of cash to poor families, with the expectation that this will contribute to an inclusion of the poorest pupils in school. Research suggests that a regular and reliable source of income can bolster a demand for schooling, both by preventing children from being withdrawn from school to engage in income generating activities, and by enabling parents to pay for school related expenses (Adato & Bassett, 2009; Behrman et al., 2011). Jones and Samuels (ibid.) recognize this vital role of cash transfers, but argue it is important not to overlook supply-side quality constraints. In

Palestine for example, Jones and Samuels found schools to be ill prepared to accommodate the increased demand for schooling of marginalized children. School counselors were overstretched and undertrained (resulting in, for example, breaking children's confidentiality), and school infrastructures did not match the needs of children physical disabilities. In Peru, cash transfers created a demand for education, increasing school inclusion, but cross-referrals of vulnerable children between schools and child protection agencies were weak. Jones and Samuels argue that this not only undermines the protection potential of schools, but can have negative effects on children's physical and psychosocial well-being as well as the desire to continue attending school. They conclude that the social protection potential of cash transfers is shaped by the extent to which supply-side deficits can be simultaneously addressed. They call for greater involvement of local communities in programme design, monitoring and evaluation, arguing this is likely to increase the protection potential of cash transfer programmes.

Similar sets of findings arise from a very different paper. Through an ethnographic and mixed methods study of two schools in rural Zimbabwe, **Campbell et al.** (this issue) explore how the quality of the school-community interface can increase demand and thereby further school inclusion. Campbell et al. compare two schools with very different levels of inclusion and well-being of HIV-affected children in Zimbabwe. They find that the rural and more poorly resourced school scored higher than a small-town and better resourced school on measures of child inclusion and well-being. Despite the fact the small-town school ticked many boxes, with superior facilities, motivated teachers, a strong support ethos and specialist HIV activities, the outcome was swung by the cohesive community environment and strong leadership characteristic of the poor rural school. Campbell et al. (this issue) conclude that the quality of school support, and thereby inclusion, is strongly affected by a combination of the vision and creativity of school leadership and the degree of social cohesion in the community around the school.

Both Jones and Samuels (this issue) and Campbell et al. (this issue) discuss community engagement as a mechanism to enable schools to support the most vulnerable children (for example, the poorest or those affected by HIV). They illustrate that putting in place an inclusive policy (whether conditional cash transfer for school attendance in Kenya, Peru and Palestine or a school-wide HIV policy at a school in Zimbabwe) is not sufficient to truly enable highly vulnerable children to receive the social and emotional support required. While facilitating school access for marginalized children is an important issue, it is only half the battle. Once these children reach school, community support and sufficient school resources are vital in enabling schools to provide them with a nurturing environment.

2.3 The potential for schools to enhance child health and welfare

The remaining eight papers look explicitly at the potential for schools to enhance the health and welfare of vulnerable children and young people. The studies do however differ in their analytical contribution. Three papers draw on the perspectives of vulnerable children and school staff to explore the potential of schools to support particular groups of children. Three papers look at naturalistic and organic responses from schools and teachers in safeguarding the health and welfare of vulnerable children. Two papers discuss the complexities and potential of school-based interventions to enhance child health and welfare.

2.3.1 Local perspectives on the potential for schools to offer support

In a mixed-method study with HIV positive learners and life skills teachers in Namibia, **Baxen** (this issue), investigates the potential for schools to support adolescents living with HIV and on antiretroviral treatment. Drawing on a case study of a school located in Windhoek, Baxen unpacks the mediating role of stigma in shaping the support potential

of schools for HIV-infected learners. The learners reported experiencing vicious and debilitating stigmatization from both peers and teachers, undermining their psychosocial health and treatment. Teachers made remarks and discriminated against HIV positive learners. Some teachers denied them access to toilet facilities and communal water taps and told them they did not belong to the school. These discriminatory practices resulted in a tension between HIV positive learners having to tell teachers about their HIV status in order to maintain their treatment regimen, while also knowing it will leave them vulnerable to stigma and discrimination (ibid.). Baxen concludes that schools, in extreme contexts characterized by pervasive stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV, are not ready or poorly equipped to support HIV positive learners on antiretroviral treatment. Instead she notes how HIV positive learners have to cope on their own and develop inner strength without much support from families or peers.

In high-income contexts, Pastoor (this issue) and Fazel (this issue) explore the support potential of schools in facilitating and mediating the psychosocial health of newly arrived refugees in Norway and UK respectively. As alluded to by both papers , the transition for immigrant children into European schools and society is difficult, at times traumatic, and experienced as extreme by the children themselves, requiring schools to take a more active role in creating an environment that can mediate their psychosocial health. **Pastoor** (this issue) argues that schools can play a decisive role in helping unaccompanied young refugees overcome some of the many psychosocial challenges associated with resettlement in a foreign country. Drawing on the qualitative perspectives of young refugees and school staff as well as participant observations, Pastoor underlines this potential. She provides examples of how schools can play an important socialization role, preparing young refugees for independent living in a new society. She also provides examples of how school is a space where young refugees can establish new relations, enhancing their adaptation and integration into society. This, coupled with academic, social or emotional support from teachers, can facilitate their coping and ability to deal with stressors as they arise.

While unpacking the potential of schools in promoting the psychosocial health of young refugees, Pastoor identifies a number of constraints on this potential. For example, she finds that teachers have insufficient knowledge about the young refugees' backgrounds and are poorly equipped to deal with the psychological struggles of young refugees, rendering them incapable of referring those most vulnerable to specialized mental health services. Pastoor argues that such constraints are framed by wider nationalistic ideologies associated with negative representations of immigrants, tainting the image teachers have of young refugees, and ultimately their capacity to support young refugees. Although Pastoor sees the potential of schools to offer support, she notes that efforts by the participating schools to mediate the psychosocial health and resettlement of young refugees remain patchy. She argues that it is not only young refugees who need to adapt to Norwegian society, but also schools who need to adapt to an increasingly diverse student body.

In another study on the psychosocial well-being of young refugees, this time in the UK, **Fazel** (this issue) focuses on informal interactions between young refugee pupils and their peers as enablers for uptake of school-based mental health services. In agreement with Pastoor (this issue), Fazel argues that schools are well placed to offer psychosocial support to vulnerable children. However, she finds that despite the availability of school-based mental health services, there are a number of barriers to access. These include language difficulties and a lack of understanding of available mental health services, such as the implications of making use of such services.

Interested in unpacking the factors that enable young refugees to overcome these barriers, Fazel interviewed young refugees discharged from school-based mental health services in Glasgow, Cardiff and Oxford. She found that many of the young refugees longed for acceptance by peer groups and society more generally. The school environment accelerated opportunities for young refugees to develop positive peer interactions, facilitating a powerful form of social recognition, and societal acceptance, which gave the young refugees the confidence and motivation to seek psychological help. To Fazel, the cementing of friendships with local peers constitutes a critical

moment of change in the resettlement process of young refugees. Her study stresses the importance of school accelerated peer social capital (Skovdal & Ogutu, 2012), and the linking or co-locating of mental health services within the school environment.

All three papers illustrate the gap between schools' potential to support vulnerable children and the reality of social stigma and missed opportunities. While the HIV stigma in Namibian schools, reported by Baxen, was the most stark and disheartening, Pastor and Fazel both also identified barriers created by aspects of the school environment that hinder new immigrant students from taking full advantage of the psychosocial support that schools can offer, both in their capacity as social spaces and as links to broader welfare services.

2.3.2 Organic school responses to enhance child health and welfare

In many low resource contexts, where social service systems are weak, schools and teachers recognize that they may form a critical node of support and protection for children who face neglect at home and live in grinding poverty. This recognition can motivate schools and teachers to act organically to offer such support. It is from this perspective that **Bhana** (this issue) writes about how a group of teachers in a township primary school in South Africa act as "foot soldiers of care", providing vulnerable children with food and clothes at their own cost, offering encouragement and psychosocial support. They were also found to provide particular forms of care to young girls at risk of sexual violence, such as strengthening their agency and confidence to stand up against older men with money and come forward to report abuse. However, Bhana notes that despite high levels of informal teacher understanding and support for vulnerable girls within the school setting, they are not able to protect girls from on-going abuse once they leave the school gates. Efforts by teachers to link at-risk girls with people and services in the wider community are constrained by the very same dynamics of crippling poverty and gender oppression that drives gender based violence in the

wider context of social inequality and social breakdown. Given these wider constraints, Bhana concludes that school-based efforts to protect young girls from sexual violence need to happen in concert with interventions beyond the terrain of schools.

Schools are also unable to protect girls from sexual violence in conditions of extreme social breakdown in northern Uganda, again despite concerted teacher efforts. **Porter's** ethnographic research discusses how teachers seek to bolster female pupils' independence and agency in order to protect them from luring soldiers and men who offer them food or money in exchange for sex. They do so through sex education using text books and signposts around the school, which encourage pupils to abstain from sex, arguing this is moral healthy behaviour. However, such efforts are undermined by gender norms that are imparted and sustained both inside and outside of the school compound, norms that support the very model of female submissiveness that makes it difficult for girls to protect themselves from abuse. Within the school compound, Porter finds teachers and signposts to both promote a sense of bodily control and independence, while also scripting pupils into sexual identities that reinforce subordinate gender roles. Despite the good intentions of teachers to protect girls from sexual violence, Porter suggests that, more often than not, these efforts reproduce rather than challenge gender stereotypes, increasing local challenges and reinforcing damaging attitudes.

Writing about a sudden disaster in an affluent setting, **Mutch** (this issue) explores how five schools in Christchurch, New Zealand, responded to the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes that hit the region. Drawing on the perspectives of a wide ranging set of informant groups, and engaging both conventional and participatory data collection methods, Mutch discusses the potential for schools to play a role in disaster responses and recovery at a time when conventional state responses and services break down. She found schools to act as community nuclei in the disaster response and recovery. Schools with capacity and deemed safe became drop-in centers and hubs for aid to be distributed. Residents from their surrounding areas were invited to sleep in the school halls. It was also at the school where hot food, water and information were distributed to

local residents. Amidst their own personal tragedies, loss of homes and dislocation, Mutch observed teachers and school leadership to exhibit heroic determination to support children in getting back to school and recovering emotionally. Schools were noted to create a 'culture of care', with teachers taking on pastoral care roles for vulnerable children and families, finding them clothes and other basic necessities to get on with their lives. Mutch's paper highlights the central role schools can play in driving forward wider community responses, and how schools, given their centrality to any community, can model stability and serve as a hub for wider service provision to facilitate disaster responses and recovery. Although the school responses reported by Mutch were organic, she argues that lessons learned can be used to inform recommendations on the role of schools in facilitating future community disaster response and recovery.

In all three papers, schools are shown to mount admirable organic responses to students needs. However, as with the other papers in this special issue, contextual factors were found to mitigate the effectiveness of these school-level actions. In both Bhana and Porters' papers, teacher efforts to protect girls from sexual exploitation and violence are framed within a context of extreme poverty, which often drives young girls into sexual relationships with older men, and patriarchal gender norms. It is a context where girls receive competing messages as sexual gatekeepers, with their moral value linked to their abstinence, and as sexual objects submissive to male sexual needs. In contrast, Mutch found that teachers in New Zealand were able to support students after devastating earthquakes, in part due to the capacity for the community to mobilize resources to meet students' immediate needs.

2.3.3 School-based interventions to enhance child health and welfare

Whilst many of the papers focus on more spontaneous and informal responses to student problems, the papers by Chauhan (this issue) and Tucker (this issue) represent more formal approaches to support and protect the health and welfare of vulnerable

children and young people. In the extreme context of hunger and malnutrition, **Chauhan** (this issue) uses a school feeding programme in India to critically appraise the use of state schools as sites for discharging social policies looking to improve the nutrition of children. Drawing on interviews and focus group discussions with community members from a village in northern India, Chauhan links community wide distrust of the central and regional governments to cynicism and controversy amongst community members around the school feeding programme. Some community members see the school feeding programme as a deliberate distraction from educating the poor, shifting social representations of schools as nodes of education to feeding stations, hindering the promotion of education in a context characterized by high levels of illiteracy. While there is no doubt that the school feeding programme benefits millions of children every day, Chauhan's study underlines the need for social policies imparted at schools to consider their interface with local communities. Drawing on social representations theory, Chauhan argues that community systems of values, ideas and practices enable local people to give meaning to and interpret social policies, which despite their well-meaning intentions, can have detrimental consequences.

Tucker (this issue) writes about pastoral care as understood and practiced in high-income countries such as the United Kingdom – where school-based services are made available to children and young people with psychosocial difficulties. Tucker brings together reflections from studies reporting on four different types of pastoral care interventions: i) group-based work to challenge and change personal circumstances, such as gang membership; ii) coaching of troubled youth; iii) implementation of pastoral care policies; and iv) inter-agency working, creating a 'team around the vulnerable child'. He notes qualitatively that the interventions have transformed the lives of some young people and encouraged new ways of working within the schools. Tucker highlights the importance of pastoral care programmes, offering a framework to explore different types of interventions, and stresses that these must be characterized by inter-sectorial and inter-agency partnerships that are appropriately resourced.

These two papers suggest that structured, school-based support programmes can contribute to much-needed support for vulnerable children, whether food insecure in India or with psychosocial risk factors in high-income settings. However, while Tucker focuses on the importance of inter-sectorial and inter-agency partnerships, Chauhan emphasizes the need for even greater collaboration down to the community level. Community engagement, Chauhan argues, is vital to ensuring that school-based programmes resonate with and respond to needs at the community level — particularly in the context of pre-existing community distrust of government.

3. 'Schools in extreme settings' as a specific problem space to unpack the social and child protection role of schools

The aim of this paper is to establish schools in extreme settings as a problem space for research and practice on the social and child protection role of schools. As evidenced by our review, there is no doubt that schools have a strong potential to support and protect children facing hardship. In fact, all papers included in this special issue, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, point to this potential. However, many of the papers also suggest that schools themselves might contribute to the social disadvantages and injustices facing children. For example, in the context of post-*intifada* Palestine, Akesson (this issue) found schools to be a place of violence, exposing children to the realities of war and occupation. Akesson found that children face considerable risk and harassment on their journey to school, and fear the presence of soldiers on school compounds and threats of demolition. In the post-conflict context of Lebanon, van Ommering (this issue) found schools to teach a version of history that did little promote peace, but instead sustained hostilities, "obstructing youth in pursuing a better future". Also Bhana (this issue) and Porter (this issue) demonstrate how schools, influenced by their wider social context, reproduce children's marginalization. In South Africa, Bhana found teachers and schools, through silence and inaction, to do little to safeguard girls at risk and challenge the gendered context that give rise to girls' sexual vulnerabilities. Similar observations have been made by Porter (this issue) in Uganda

who illustrates how schools reproduce gender norms, scripting girls into the kind of feminine identities that leave them vulnerable to sexual violence.

To unpack this dual role of schools, we now outline some of the contours of a new problem space for researchers and activists looking to investigate the social and child protection role of schools. These may include:

- *Defining school, extreme, care and support* – The 'schools in extreme settings' problem space is at this point riddled with imprecision around how you define school, extreme, care and support. Take 'extreme setting' as an example. What is an extreme setting? Should it refer to an acute, momentary issue (e.g., an earthquake) or chronic poverty and violence? Can it apply to contexts that are not impoverished or in-flux, but the child is (e.g., refugees in Norway or UK)? In this issue we have used a broad understanding of 'extreme settings', but primarily with the purpose of sparking discussion. Furthermore, terms like schools, extreme, care and support are loaded with ideological and moral values, which, when used uncritically, can divert attention away from the complexity at hand.
- *School actors* – Related to defining what is meant by school, is the need to disentangle who the school actors are, their agenda and different interests and roles vis-à-vis schools as a node of support. School actors are not a singular group of people. As highlighted by the papers in this issue, teachers and school leaders can both be part of the problem and the solution to the hardship experienced by children and youth.
- *The family, school and state nexus* – The problem space invites researchers and activists to interrogate the relationship between families, schools and the state. A number of papers included in this special issue speak of how schools, in the absence of a functional families and government services, take on the responsibility of supporting and protecting children (e.g., the papers by Bhana, Porter and Mutch). Whilst this is admirable in many ways, and highlight important

innate resources, from which much can be learnt, this task shifting is problematic, particularly in the absence of discussions around the responsibility of the state as a duty bearer to uphold children's rights to care and protection.

- *Schools in context* – Schools are not islands that can be studied in a vacuum, out of context of the communities in which they are located, and which give life to the symbolic resources that shape and transform every day practice. It was the focus of our review to highlight the spectrum of contextual factors that either hinder of facilitate the ability of schools to support and protection children in extreme settings. However, much more needs to be done to unpack the role of context. For example, under what conditions can schools become expressions/sites of community resilience, as alluded to by Akesson (this issue) in the Palestinian territories and Mutch (this issue) in New Zealand?
- *Schools as sites of ideology* – Schools play an important role in socializing and civilizing children and young people, preparing them for the society in which they are a part of. But how do ideology and the civilizing project manifest itself within a school setting? When is a civilizing project supportive or obstructive to the welfare of children and young people? For example, van Ommering (this issue) argues that history education in Lebanon is obstructive in so far as it maintains a hegemonic and political view of historical events, doing little to socialize children and young people for a more peaceful future. What can schools do to counteract hegemonic teaching practices and curricula deemed obstructive to the welfare of children and young people?

These are just some of the many areas that deserve closer scrutiny as the 'schools in extreme settings' problem space unfolds.

4. Final thoughts

In this paper we have reviewed the papers in this special issue in the interests of outlining the contours of a new problem space for researchers and activists - namely

schools in extreme settings. Drawing on a range of research papers across five continents, we have mapped out a range of theoretical frames, research methodologies and empirical findings. We hope this will provide a springboard for the development of further consolidated research in this field, contributing to the development of a conceptual and methodological toolkit for advancing the theory of social and child protection to inform a vitally important area of practice.

We also made some headway in critically appraising the potential for schools (and the actors within) to offer social and child protection. Based on case studies presented in this special issue, we argue that schools cannot be viewed as a 'magic bullet' capable of tackling the impacts of complex social problems without significant resources and outside support. We caution against regarding schools as islands, out of the context of their location in the wider communities in which complex social problems are located. In many ways schools may sometimes be part and parcel of the wider social systems that generate the very ill-health, discrimination or conflict that impact negatively on learners. Finally we point to differences in the views of contributors who suggest that schools have little power to protect children from social problems arising from factors beyond the control of teachers and schools-based interventions, and those who see the potential for schools-based programmes to not only protect children, but also to contribute to the tackling of wider social problems. Again it is probably not a coincidence that contributors holding the latter position tend to do so on the basis of research in far more privileged and stable countries than those holding the former.

Unresolved debates of this nature contribute to the much needed challenge to disrupt the stereotype that often underpins policy of schools as potential 'safe havens' for children: the implicit image of tidy buildings surrounded by high fences that seal off the troublesome outside world, and filled with caring teachers, and rows of children sitting on benches – guided by wise and powerful head teachers and educational ministries. Whilst elements of this stereotype may indeed sometimes be the case, reality is often messier than this, with school actors having different agendas and interests. The

potential for schools to serve as sources of support is huge, but they also have the potential to serve as sources of strain on both children and teachers in ways that challenge the policy ideal. It is in embracing this complexity and messiness that real debates can start to take place about the support, resources and policies that might be optimize the likelihood of schools playing their optimal role in social protection and care in difficult settings.

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